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STATE FOR PM, NP, AND EUR/WE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [CH](#) [FR](#) [NATO](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: MOD ADVISOR UPBEAT ON BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP; SEES
RAPPROCHEMENT ON MIDDLE EAST; NO CHANGE ON EU CHINA ARMS
EMBARGO

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1
.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: Defense Minister Alliot-Marie's Diplomatic Advisor Bertrand Besancenot provided Political Minister-Counselor with a readout of the Minister's March 9-10 visit to the United States. He described at length the positive tone in the bilateral relationship, as reflected in Alliot-Marie's meetings at the NSC, the Pentagon, and the Department. He also welcomed the convergence in our views on Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, and the Middle East. He said the U.S. and Europe needed to better convince the Sunnis in Iraq to engage in the political process and for the Shi'ites to include them. On Afghanistan, the French remain unconvinced about participating in PRTs, but continue to support the NATO ISAF mission. In contrast, Besancenot maintained that U.S. concerns over the lifting of the EU arms embargo on China were misplaced, that further consultations were needed, and that as a result of Alliot-Marie's visit, Paris has a better appreciation of the intensity of U.S. opposition to an embargo lift. Besancenot, however, did not confirm GOF support for consultations on the embargo as part of a strategic dialog on China. End summary.

Middle East

12. (C) Bertrand Besancenot was very expansive and pleased with Alliot-Marie's meetings in Washington. He said there had been an open exchange of views, reflecting the new and positive tone in the bilateral relationship. Alliot-Marie's speeches at Harvard and SAIS, accordingly, emphasized the excellent dialog between the United States and Europe, each side "complementing" the efforts of the other in seeking solutions to world problems, without glossing over our differences. By way of example, he turned to a discussion of the Middle East, noting that it was a region where our differences had been most prominent, but where we now are experiencing a general rapprochement of views. On Lebanon, he noted that there is unity of purpose and action, even if our point of departure was not the same. The original French focus was on strengthening Lebanese sovereignty, while the U.S. sought to ratchet up pressure on Syria. Besancenot, nonetheless, stressed that now we need together to push for full implementation of UNSC 1559; Syria must depart Lebanon even if it will lose the economic and financial advantages it derives from being in Lebanon. Turning to Iran and the EU3 negotiations, Besancenot commented favorably on our shared non-proliferation goal for the region. Iranians are sharp and devious, he observed, and they need to understand that the United States and the EU are not divided. We have a division of labor with the EU demonstrating firmness at the negotiations and the U.S. flexibility, following the recent U.S. decision to more strongly support the EU3 negotiations. He made a similar point about the situation on the Palestinian territories and Israel, stating that we are in agreement on helping Abbas and Sharon, especially as Sharon faces pressures from the settlers and within his own party.

Iraq/Afghanistan

13. (C) We pressed Besancenot on French integration of its proposed bilateral training program for security forces with NATO's own training mission. Besancenot responded that France was doing its share. We both wish to see the successful stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq, he stated, and then recited French contributions to date: support for the NATO decision to establish a training mission, support for a debt cancellation, substantial contribution to the NATO trust funds, and agreement to assign one French officer to the NATO "clearing house." Alluding to the French decision not to allow French participation in Iraq, Besancenot stressed that France wanted to avoid having decisions on the NATO training mission adversely affect the improved bilateral relationship. That said, the GOF did not intend to link its own bilateral training program (once stood up) with the NATO mission.

14. (C) Regarding Iraq's future, Besancenot reiterated that it is in our mutual interest to help train security forces and

to push the Iraqis to better integrate the Sunni community so that they have a stake in the country. For success in Iraq, we need to see the Sunnis included in the emerging political structures, but the current signals to the Sunnis are not clear. The U.S. and the EU need to help send a stronger political message to the Iraqis that the Sunnis must be brought into the political process. He also observed that the U.S. and France have disagreed on the issue of Iraqi sovereignty and the timing for a withdrawal of foreign troops. The Political Minister Counselor reminded Besancenot that the U.S. is currently focused on enhancing stability in Iraq, and providing the wherewithal for Iraqi forces to deal with security threats -- after which a withdrawal of foreign troops would become possible. However, it would be premature and counter-productive to set a withdrawal date up front. In response, Besancenot voiced uncertainty over U.S. long-term plans in Iraq, indicating that the French Embassy in Baghdad had learned from senior officials at our Embassy in Baghdad that the U.S. wished to maintain a long-term presence in Iraq, which, if true, would send the wrong message to the Sunnis.

15. (C) We pressed Besancenot on further French contributions to ISAF in Afghanistan. He said Alliot-Marie had signaled in Washington that France agreed in principle to the OEF/ISAF merger, but disagreed on the timetable. France believes it could only happen when the terrorist threat had diminished. On ISAF expansion, Besancenot was noncommittal on French participation in PRTs or the Quick Reaction Force, and cryptically cited Secdef's alleged criticisms of the German PRT in Kunduz during his meeting with Alliot-Marie. Nonetheless, he was careful to emphasize French support for ISAF. France, he stressed, will also reinforce its support for the Afghan elections (provision of combat planes and support staff) and increase its training of the Afghan army.

EU China Arms Embargo -----

16. (C) Besancenot contrasted the excellent atmospherics of the minister's visit and our convergence of views on Middle East issues with our different perspectives on the EU arms embargo on China. While praising the improved tone of the bilateral relationship that can only contribute to the current U.S.-EU discussions over the embargo, he volunteered that EU capitals have clearly misunderstood the intensity of the U.S. opposition to lifting the embargo. The EU had concluded from the President's discussions with French President Chirac last February, that the Administration was against the lift, but that the "real problem" was with Congress. Now, it has become clear that USG is firmly opposed to the lift, with Secdef, NSC Advisor Hadley, and the Secretary conveying this message firmly to Alliot-Marie.

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Besancenot expressed the fear that we are headed for a "tsunami" on this issue. The Political Minister Counselor reiterated the U.S. position that we remain opposed to the lift and had made clear for quite some time that lifting the embargo would lead to unacceptable technology transfers to China, which would threaten the regional strategic balance. Besancenot, recapitulated Alliot-Marie's often-stated message that France has the strictest export-controls on dual-use technology and that it would never sell technology or weapons that would be of concern to "our U.S. ally." France, he added, is cognizant that the U.S. is a Pacific power with direct interests in the region, that it shares our concern not to see sophisticated technology in China, and that it is prepared to push its EU colleagues to tighten their own export control regimes. Besancenot further explained that the embargo only covers lethal weapons, and not dual-use technology, nor does it have any affect on China's principal arms suppliers, Russia, and other suppliers such as Israel.

17. (C) Returning to Alliot-Marie's visit and her meeting with Senators and members of Congress, Besancenot said they heard three main arguments in the U.S. against lifting the embargo: China's inadequate human rights progress, adverse affect on the region, especially Taiwan and Korea, and concern over technology transfers. Besancenot admitted that the human rights situation in China is not good, but added that it is better than it was in 1989. He believes Europe is aware of the regional concerns. He dismissed the technology transfer argument by emphasizing that Europe agreed with us on controlling dual-use exports. The MOD has concluded that U.S. arguments are mostly invalid and that the only new argument presented by the Congress was an "emotional" one against lifting the embargo. Along this line, he said one senior Senator, without agreeing with the French position, confided that the Congress was not fully informed of all the points of discussion on the embargo and asked the French for a paper, which the French Embassy subsequently delivered. Besancenot concluded that Europe needed to do a better job through an expansion of its contacts with the U.S. to explain the substance of its arguments and pointed to the visit to Washington of Solana nonproliferation advisor Annalisa

Giannella as the latest EU effort. He linked the Giannella visit to a proposed EU-U.S. strategic dialog on China, which the EU was awaiting U.S. views on. The Political Minister-Counselor suggested that a strategic dialog on China should logically precede any EU discussion with regard to the arms embargo; it should not be conceived as merely a next step after a lift. Besancenot took the point, but recalled that the EU had agreed at the December 2004 EU Council meeting to lift the embargo, which he still foresaw happening during the Luxembourg Presidency.

18. (C) In defense of China, Besancenot took up the Chinese argument that blocking arms exports was incompatible with Western recognition of China's influence in the world as evidenced through its participation in the WTO and the Olympics Games. He described China as an important player in a multipolar world, which should be treated as a responsible partner and not lumped in the same league as Zimbabwe and other countries on the embargo list. He explained that multipolarity is not a concept designed to irritate the United States, but is simply the recognition of a reality: in 20-30 years Brazil, China, and India, among others, will become serious powers. Europe and the U.S., linked through the common bonds of history, must work together to ensure that they influence China's development. Lifting the embargo would only make China a more responsible player, he stated.

19. (C) Comment: The MOD has often been more supportive than other ministries of U.S. positions. Senior officials are more forthcoming than their counterparts at the MFA, for instance. Besancenot and his colleagues were clearly pleased with the Defense Minister's visit, are eager to put differences on Iraq behind us, and welcome our close coordination on Lebanon. Besancenot's comments in defense of the planned decision to lift the arms embargo, while otherwise not new, included an awareness that they, and other EU member states, may have misread the President's and the Secretary's message during their meetings in Europe. While

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senior MFA officials have previously voiced a desire for broad consultations with us on China, Besancenot, perhaps not wishing to exceed his brief, stopped short of supporting a strategic dialog before any further steps are taken with the embargo. End comment.

110. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

Leach